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Megamyth shadows Nevada casino openings

Megamyth shadows Nevada casino openings 28 December 2009

By Howard Stutz

LAS VEGAS, Nevada — We can all blame Elmer Sherwin for one of the greatest urban myths in Nevada gaming.

On Nov. 22, 1989, the 76-year-old retiree won a \$4.6 million Megabucks jackpot at The Mirage. The slot machine pull came about 10 hours after the resort opened.

Sherwin's jackpot is the basis for a prevailing legend: Megabucks will hit on a casino's opening night."Unfortunately, no. I hate to be the spoiler," said Boris Hallerbach, product manager for MegaJackpots, a business unit of slot machine giant International Game Technology, which operates Megabucks.

Despite popular belief, there isn't a magic switch that can be flipped that ensures the three Megabucks symbols line up on a designated slot machine at a particular casino during a certain time.

Hallerbach explained that a random generator controlled by a central computer oversees the Megabucks system. Each of the 761 Megabucks slot machine in 156 Nevada casinos hooked into the network has the same odds of hitting the jackpot.

The odds, he said, are not public information.

"There is no correlation between Megabucks hitting and the opening of a casino," Hallerbach said.

Try telling that to the true believers.

Seven months after The Mirage opened, the Megabucks machines were consistently filled for the first weekend of the Excalibur.

Every subsequent casino opening in the past 20 years — including MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay, The Venetian, Bellagio, and Wynn Las Vegas — has witnessed a run on their Megabucks slot machines by gamblers thinking a jackpot was imminent.

Two weeks ago, a couple of hard-core players waited in line for Aria to open, carrying a bankroll ready for action because they believed in the Megabucks opening-night superstition.

Reportedly, these folks also believe in the existence of the Yeti or his North American cousin, the Sasquatch.

I hold Sherwin responsible.

Since his jackpot at The Mirage, there have been some two dozen casino openings in Las Vegas. none of those events produced a Megabucks jackpot.

IGT introduced Megabucks in 1986 and the system has paid out almost \$650 million in jackpots.

Sherwin kept on playing Megabucks, and 16 years later he hit the Megabucks jackpot again, this time at the Cannery in North Las Vegas, for more than \$21.1 million.

That jackpot was bad news for conspiracy theorists. Sherwin's second Megabucks came more than two years after the Cannery opened.

Somebody threw the wrong switch.

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[Megamyth shadows Nevada casino openings](#)

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Las Vegas Review-Journal Carol Cling column: MOVIE REVIEW: “Nine”

By Carol Cling, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Dec. 25—In the real world, nine is always greater than 81/2.

In the reel world, however, “Nine” turns out to be less — waaaay less — than “81/2.”

Not that it qualifies as a surprise.

“Nine” may be a Tony-winning Broadway musical, but it’s only a riff on its landmark source: director Federico Fellini’s Oscar-winning 1963 classic, “81/2.”

But not only is “Nine” not “81/2,” it’s not even “Chicago,” director Rob Marshall’s previous cinematic transfer of a standout Broadway musical.

“Chicago” won 2002’s best picture Oscar. (Why, I’m still not sure — but that’s another debate for another time.) “Nine,” however, is unlikely to make the Academy’s expanded best picture chorus line of 10 nominees.

It’s not just because “Chicago’s” a vastly superior musical, with a far more interesting story and a classic score (by those wonderful folks who also brought you “Cabaret,” Fred Kander and John Ebb).

No, it’s also because “Nine’s” musical numbers, entertaining as they may be individually, never manage to form a cohesive, compelling narrative whole.

then again, that almost makes sense — considering that “Nine” concerns itself with the personal and professional tribulations of celebrated director Guido Contini (Daniel Day-Lewis).

Contini (rhymes with Fellini) happens to be the toast of 1960s cinema — pursued by the press and paparazzi, besieged by eager audiences and associates, all of whom wonder what his next big-screen opus will be.

They're not the only ones.

Guido, you see, is in the grip of a major creative block, unable to conjure anything for his next production — even though it's supposed to start shooting all too soon.

Besides, he's got other, more personal crises to face.

especially his endless efforts to do right by his long-suffering actress wife Luisa (Marion Cotillard) while satisfying the demands of his needy mistress Carla (Penelope Cruz).

They're far from the only women in Guido's life, however.

There's costume designer and confidante Lilli (a wry Judi Dench). International screen goddess Claudia (ethereal Nicole Kidman), his on-screen muse. Saucy fashion reporter Stephanie (a go-go Kate Hudson), who'd love to get up close and personal with "Cinema Italiano's" international style-setter. Not to mention childhood memories of two very different but equally influential women: his saintly mother (the legendary, forever regal Sophia Loren) and hometown tart Saraghina (a lusty, zesty Stacy "Fergie" Ferguson), who long ago showed young Guido and his pals exactly how to "Be Italian."

that adds up to six Oscar-winners in the starring cast (and seven Academy Awards — Day-Lewis has two), plus a nominee in Hudson. (And let's not forget Fergie's Grammy Awards with the Black Eyed Peas.)

All that hardware, however, only highlights the gap between "Nine's" dynamite promise and its less-than-explosive execution.

The screenplay (credited to "The Player's" Michael Tolkin and the late Anthony Minghella, who won an Oscar for directing "The English Patient") sets the stage for a survey of Guido's circuslike life.

But "Nine" never addresses a vital issue: why we should care about the performer in the center ring, struggling to maintain his balance on the high-wire while juggling crises artistic and personal.

Director Marshall doesn't even try to deal with this structural problem.

He simply ignores it, hoping the numbers themselves will prove dazzling enough to overcome the problem.

perhaps if composer Maury Yeston's songs (including three new ones written for the movie) provided as much character insight as they do chances for song-and-dance panache, "Nine" might have achieved genuine emotional impact.

Yet instead of moving the story forward, the numbers bring the movie to a dead halt every time the music cranks up. They're literal show-stoppers — and definitely not in the standing-ovation sense.

as a result, much of "Nine" plays like a series of music videos — more or less diverting individually, but incapable of adding up to much more.

Of "Nine's" starry sirens, all of whom look smashing, only Cotillard and Cruz convey any kind of depth along with the surface glitter.

Cruz augments her character's steamy sexual allure with crack comic timing and crazed yet undeniable vulnerability, and Cotillard displays a valiant, if increasingly world-weary, grace; when she finally calls Guido's bluff, it's as close as "Nine" ever gets to a transcendent emotional moment.

maybe if Javier Bardem hadn't been too exhausted to play Guido, "Nine" might have had a charismatic, charming star capable of making us care as much about Guido as we do about the women whose hearts he breaks.

Sadly, Day-Lewis is not that star.

A marvelous actor, to be sure (I keep wondering what "Sherlock Holmes" would have been like if he had been cast in the title role), Day-Lewis ably captures Guido's restless lightning-in-a-bottle energy. But he never musters either the artistic vision or the gleeful passion that keeps Guido in the game — and makes others want to keep playing, however grandiose or outlandish Guido's game might seem.

The same goes for "Nine" as a whole.

it looks great. (Alas, it never sounds quite as great as it looks.)

But if I have to choose between art direction and heart direction, I'll take the latter every time.

Contact movie critic Carol Cling at ccling@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0272.

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THE STRIP: Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock to open new hotel towers - Las Vegas Review

The 1,201-room PH Towers at Planet Hollywood Resort and the 374-room HRH Tower at the Hard Rock Hotel open to a market with hotel occupancy in the mid-80 percent and declining room rates.

The owners of these towers, however, see the expansions as an investment in the future of Las Vegas when the economy returns.

The 52-story blue-and-red tower's rooms are marketed for travelers who want to stay in Las Vegas for an extended time, such as citywide conventioneers. Built as time shares, rooms come with full kitchens, washers and dryers, and state-of-the-art electronics and bedroom features.

"The tower is for the upscale customer who wants to enjoy an all-suite product," Planet Hollywood Resort President Bill Feather said.

The tower is a joint venture between Planet Hollywood Resort and Florida-based time share company Westgate. About 200 units are being sold as time shares with the rest being used for hotel rooms.

The tower had its soft opening Dec. 18 when nearly 20 people used their time shares.

Feather said the tower will open with 330 rooms on Monday, growing to 500 rooms by New Year's Eve.

Nearly 200 rooms will be added in time for the International Consumer Electronics show that begins Jan. 7. the full tower will be open for the Miss America Pageant on Jan. 30. Planet Hollywood will hold the tower's grand opening the same weekend.

The rooms are being marketed at \$229 midweek and \$349 weekends, Feather said.

The top four floors will be 16 condominium units ranging from 6,000 square feet to 18,000 square feet.

The new tower features a pool that will open in the summer. A lobby bar will open Monday and plans are being developed for two restaurants off the lobby.

The tower's 100-foot entrance is just past the closed Steve Wyrick Theater in the Miracle Mile Shops. the casino is located nearly 150 yards from the PH Tower's entrance, Feather said.

The new tower brings Planet Hollywood Resort's room count to 3,697 rooms.

The all-suite HRH tower along Harmon Avenue is part of the larger \$750 million expansion that has been opening up in stages since early spring and will be completed in April.

The tower's 374 rooms include seven penthouse suites and eight spa villas.

Opening with the tower is the 25,000-square-foot Reliquary Spa, a new parking garage with a porte-cochere and 40,000 square feet of new casino space.

A new nightclub, the 14,000-square-foot Vanity, opens Dec. 31, which will be the last night for the old nightclub, Body English.

Hard Rock Hotel President and Chief Operating Officer Randy Kwasniewski said this part of the expansion is marketed more to casino players who haven't had the full amenities available at other resorts at the Hard Rock Hotel until now.

"It's for the higher-end customer that we would assume is looking for a boutique experience," Kwasniewski said. "It has all the amenities necessary. It is a bit of a different design for that customer."

The HRH Tower caters to a different market than the 450-room Paradise Tower, which opened in July.

The Paradise Tower was designed for corporate meetings and convention guests, as well as group customers. That tower is convenient to the meeting space and the new Joint concert hall.

The property is planning a large grand-opening celebration in April, when the pool expansion is complete. Three restaurants are also planned in the new casino, an area which used to house the old Joint, in second quarter of 2010.

The expansion brings the property's casino space to 70,000 square feet supported by 1,506 rooms.

[THE STRIP: Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock to open new hotel towers - Las Vegas Review](#)

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Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal**MATT YOUMANS: All's fair in Super Bowl prop bets**MATT YOUMANS
MORE COLUMNS**MORE INFO**

• Super Bowl XLIV

Only in the Super Bowl can a golfer (Phil Mickelson), a hockey star (Sidney Crosby) and a socialite/TV personality (Kim Kardashian) figure into the outcome of a wager. This is a football game unlike any other.

The betting public has already picked a side. The Indianapolis Colts are 51/2-point favorites over the New Orleans Saints on Feb. 7 in Miami, and Las Vegas sports books are getting flooded with cash on the Colts.

The books and contrarians will pull for Drew Brees and the Saints to slay the NFL's Goliath quarterback, Peyton Manning.

"A lot of people who are going to bet this game, all they know is Peyton Manning," Las Vegas Hilton sports book director Jay Kornegay said.

But it's not all about Manning or Brees. The performance of Thomas Morstead also matters. Morstead is the Saints' punter, and he's the subject of at least three Hilton proposition wagers.

In the Super Bowl, every play is significant, and that's because the explosion of prop betting has transformed the game into a carnival. On Super Sundays now, the only things missing from sports books are bearded ladies, dancing bears and juggling midgets.

I believe the Colts will win the game, and don't be surprised if the score sneaks under the total of 561/2. But sports bettors like a variety of options. There's much more to debate than the side and total.

The Hilton posts more props than any book. After Kornegay and his staff of oddsmakers made a few late additions, I counted 335 props -- give or take a few, because I lost concentration.

"We basically just make these up until we get tired," said Kornegay, who's in charge of approving prop disclaimers and ensuring all gray areas are eliminated. "The props really make the event. It has become such a popular part of Super Bowl weekend. We've never had a prop with zero bets. Not even close to it."

A prop on Brees' total completions counts as one, but it includes 42 wagers -- odds are offered on his completions at every number from zero (100-1 odds) to 41 or more (30-1).

The Hilton, which gets about 50 percent of its Super Bowl handle on props, will make its prop book available this afternoon. It's fun reading for recreational bettors. For professional gamblers, props are serious business. The books will post a few weak numbers that the pros can scalp and try to middle and turn the winnings into a month's income.

It's important to do prop shopping because of varying numbers. The pros will be burning a trail around town to hit spots such as the M Resort, MGM Mirage, Gold Coast, Golden Nugget, Palace Station, Plaza, Bally's, Binion's, Sahara, Stratosphere, Treasure Island, Wynn and the Hilton.

For example, there is a prop on whether the Saints' Reggie Bush will score a touchdown. On Thursday, you could bet "Yes" for plus-210 at M Resort, but the price was plus-150 at the Hilton.

This Super Bowl, with two high-powered offenses and several star players, shapes up as one of the best for prop bets.

"When people bet these things, they bet 'Yes' and they bet 'Over,' because everybody comes in and they want to see things happen," Kornegay said. "The high total indicates a lot of things are going to happen in this game. It makes us a little nervous."

"We kind of want the game to be uneventful. We would do really well if the Colts win 3-0."

In the mid-1990s, props were a Super Bowl afterthought in Las Vegas, where most books posted about 25 of them. But back then, cell phones weren't popular yet.

A guy from the celebrity Web site TMZ.com called the Hilton and suggested a Kim Kardashian-related prop. So Kornegay posted one with her boyfriend, Bush, against her brother-in-law, Lamar Odom of the Los Angeles Lakers. It's Bush's total rushing yards in the Super Bowl against Odom's total points, rebounds and assists in the Lakers game.

Mickelson is involved in a prop, but another prominent golfer is missing. "We don't have any Tiger Woods props up," Kornegay said. "We couldn't use him this year."

Here's an idea: Who will score more on Feb. 7? Manning (total touchdown passes) in the Super Bowl or Woods at the sex rehab clinic? Manning might be the underdog in that bet.

Contact sports betting columnist Matt Youmans at myoumans@reviewjournal.com or 702-387-2907.

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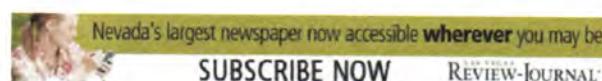
thanks for not telling us why we cannot get the LV hilton prop bets after advertising they would be up and available last friday. Your column is worthless

Besh Cooper is right. wrote on January 29, 2010 12:51 PM:

They need a "BET" line and an "INFO" line. I remember when the Imperial Palace had a "Drive-By" betting booth in their parking lot behind the casino. Road Rage would surely erupt now.

Besh Cooper wrote on January 29, 2010 09:52 AM:

The props are fun BUT there are too many now.
The books, and I guess the wagering public, have taken it too far.
Very frustrating standing behind a line of tourists hogging a window and asking what all the props mean.



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